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SECRET

23 April 1982

ARGENTINA: Galtieri's Prospects

President Galtieri's widespread domestic political support in the Falklands dispute masks underlying difficulties he will have holding together a political coalition, maintaining military cohesion, and strengthening international support. He will increasingly have to resort to nationalistic posturing to keep his backers together. This will in turn further constrict his room for diplomatic maneuver. 3.5(c)

Reliance on extreme nationalism will allow Galtieri to weather a stalemate--even if there are military casualties--for a brief period. After a month or so, however, the strains on the economy--and on his presidency--will be severe. 3.3(b)(1)

The politically ambitious Galtieri has taken enormous risks in his dealings with the military. 3.3(b)(1)

Some officers believe that Galtieri's excessive reliance on advice from the hardline Navy led him to misjudge the British and US response. Such perceptions are especially dangerous to Galtieri because the Army is the dominant service and Galtieri has had to work assiduously to line up support in it for a bid to remain Commander in Chief beyond his mandatory retirement in December. 3.5(c)

If Galtieri wins his gamble on the Falklands, he could dictate his role. In a case of less than clearcut gains, however, many important armed forces leaders could disassociate themselves from the President and dump him. 3.5(c)

Civilian Support

All Argentine political parties, even those with antimilitary leftist factions, have rallied to Galtieri.

SECRET 3.5(c)

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So far, the President appears to have made few commitments to these erstwhile opponents, who currently have little choice but to drape themselves with the flag. Any diplomatic setbacks will force Galtieri to keep appealing to the spirit of nationalism, which the hardline press is raising to new heights. 3.5(c)

Over time, the continuing need for civilian backing will enhance the power of ultranationalistic Peronist factions and labor. This will reduce Galtieri's room for political maneuver and increase pressure to abandon economic reforms in favor of a return to a Peronist state-controlled economy. 3.5(c)

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Outlook

Galtieri cannot control the political climate that he has created. He will be in serious trouble if his efforts at diplomatic compromise bring into question either his resolve to confront the British or ultimate Argentine sovereignty over the islands. The President's military and civilian supporters would begin to back away from him. 3.5(c)

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Only a clear Argentine victory will preserve Galtieri's position. At a minimum, he will have to present the appearance of something more than a status quo ante bellum. If not, the combined costs of his Falklands adventure will prompt a military coup. 3.5(c)

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